1:Opler E-5 (1931-1937)1941
(ca. 1870) NT8 Eastern Apache NT8
Chiricahua

The person who agrees to erect a sweat house is not a true shaman, nor are the rights which are now transmitted from individual to individual explained as a result of some past power experience. Thus, one informant was of the opinion that Child of the Water "gave the custom." And yet the right to build a sweat house is a special prerogative, claimed and controlled by relatively few men.

Not everybody can make a sweat bath. Just certain men can do it—men to whom the knowledge has been handed down. Such a man builds it or directs the building of it. All the while it is being built he sings and prays for it. He handles every movement in connection with it ceremonially, just as he was directed to do when the right was handed down to him. He is present when the sweat bath is used. He is the one who chants the prayer part of the song when the men are inside, though all who are in there join in the refrain. He is usually quite an old man. He sets the rules. You can't just come in and go out as you please. It might be in this man's "way" that you have to stay in there through a certain number of songs. Then you have to do it.

The sweat bath is used for good health, for long life, and to cure sickness. It is usually built near water, and when the songs are finished everybody rushes out and plunges into the water. Very old men who can't do that sit down on the bank and splash water on themselves.

An account of the erection and use of the structure may place the practice in perspective:

Sweat-bathing is for health and good fortune. Deformed people do it a great deal and are massaged when they come out. Usually a sick or deformed man pays one who knows how to put it on, but no special kind of payment is given. Others are invited. But often the man who knows how will just put it on for the benefit of the people. When the announcement is made, many men want to take the sweat bath. Everything else is laid aside. This is a special occasion. Women don't take sweat baths, nor boys before the racing [boy's training] age.

The sweat house could be made any time of year, but it is usually done in the summer. It is dome shaped like the regular house, only smaller. It is about four and a half feet high and about six feet in diameter. The framework is of oak, tied together at the top. The outside is covered with brush and with skins. No smoke hole is left at the top. The door faces the east. On the inside, close to the door and on one side of it, there is a pit for the hot rocks. The man in charge directs the making of this sweat house.

In the morning a person who is sick or deformed and who is going in there prays in his own way. He may say, "I am sick in this manner. I want to get well, and so I am doing this in the right way."

Often they begin about midmorning. Twelve is the most allowed in at one

1:Opler E-5 (1931-1937)1941
(ca. 1870) NT8 Eastern Apache NT8
Chiricahua

contact with the track of a bear, or a tree where a bear has leaned, or bear manure, or if you sleep where a bear has sat down, or if you come in contact with a bear by smell or touch, you can get sick. 753 825

The smell is very important. As soon as it gets in a person through smell, that person is under evil influence. If a person does not come in contact with a bear but is scared by a bear, it causes sickness too. The condition of fright that a man gets in causes his sickness. [828]

A person suffering from bear sickness gets run down. It seems like he is smelling that bear all the time. At night he is always dreaming that he has hardly got away from a bear that is chasing him, or something like that. . . . . Bear sickness often shows up in a deformity, in a crooked arm or leg. [732]

Should the path of a bear be accidently crossed, an attempt is made to deceive the bear about it. "If you have to cross the tracks of a bear, you say, 'It was a year ago.' It is the custom to say that to make it appear that it happened a long time ago, so the evil influence will keep away."

Specific symptoms equated with the characteristics of the bear mark the onset of bear sickness:

When a man is sick from bear, he acts like a bear. First he gets a pain all over his body. Then his mouth is twisted, and he bites. His whole face twists. His body swells.

Long ago at Fort Stanton two men got sick from bear and died. These two men were out. It was snowing. There was a big pine tree. A bear had been there. The two men slept there all night. They got sick from it. Their arms went behind their backs, and they growled like bears. I saw them when they were sick. They tried to bite me.

A long time ago, when I was a child, I was playing in a cave where a bear had lived. Pretty soon I got sick. I got tired, wanted to lie down, and foam came out of my mouth as it does from the mouth of a bear when he is tired. They had a ceremony performed for me, and I got better. The shaman sang, and I got well that same night. [755]

Coyote, wolf, fox, dog.—The coyote, if he is molested, can, at the very least, bring bad luck or an accident: 825 777 752

Our dog ran ahead [after a coyote]. Suddenly the dog doubled his tracks and ran right in front of S.'s horse. The horse went over as S. tried to avoid the dog, and S. fell and hit his head. He didn't come to for a long time. We were far away from anyone, and I didn't have any water. All I could do was sit there and hold his head and fan him with my hat. By and by he came to. That's what the old men say about coyotes; they say that Coyote is bad and that something always happens to you if you go after one.

1;Opler E-5 (1931-1937)1941
(ca. 1870) NT8 Eastern Apache NT8
Chiricahua

753 More serious is a disease, marked by deformity, which Coyote
732 is capable of causing:
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When a person has it, his face gets lopsided with the mouth pointing one way. Or he gets cross-eyed, or his legs or hands get cramped. There is a disfiguration somewhere. You can get it from a coyote—from touch or fright or smell, or from crossing its tracks. We kill coyotes sometimes, but we don't touch the skins.

Eye defects, particularly, are attributed to coyote sickness. "One man whose eyeballs turn up told me that his eyes were all right until he used a coyote skin for a rug. Since then his eyes have been bad."

753 The coyote shares his evil reputation with the wolf and the
825 fox. Most informants class the three together and claim that the ceremony that will cure sickness from one of them will serve for illness brought by the others. There is a definite feeling that the fox is the least dangerous of the trio and that the coyote is the
[763] most baneful. The appearance of a fox, however, is taken as an omen of impending death: "Gray Fox . . . . is connected with death. If at dark Fox goes near some camps, that means that someone in that group is going to die."

In the following discussion the nexus between wolf sickness and the evil influence of the coyote is made clear:

[777] The wolf, coyote, and fox . . . . bring bad luck and make you sick, even if you
[732] only touch them or smell their breath. Such contact deforms a person, making him cross-eyed, turning his lips, and making him twitch. At Fort Sill an old lady had her dog follow a wolf. The woman went after the wolf in order to help her dog, and she pulled the wolf, which was in a hole, by the hind leg. She became
[755] ill. She began to get cross-eyed and to shake, and her lips became crooked. Geronimo was living then, and he sang over her and cured her.[10]

231 Of dogs the people say: "We didn't have dogs in the old days.
177 Dogs make a lot of noise. The Chiricahua were on the run and couldn't have them." "We have had them only since contact
231 with the whites." Evidently the dog was at first greatly feared:
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The dog was classed with the coyote, wolf, and fox. We felt that all of them could cause you trouble. We wouldn't touch the skin of a dead dog. When you have a disease from a dog, the saliva comes down as it does with a mad dog. You get a little crazy and go, "Aaaa!"

[10] Geronimo's coyote power ceremony (pp. 40–41) is probably what was used on this occasion.

I:Opler E-5 (1931-1937)1941
(ca. 1870) NT8 Eastern Apache NT8
Chiricahua

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Since it is so dangerous when lightning strikes near by, everything is avoided that might "draw" it:

When I was little I was told not to have anything red around when it was raining. Even in camps we used to stick red things under something so they wouldn't show. We consider it dangerous to have red things out during a storm. It is because they draw lightning. Red is connected with lightning. And today the Chiricahua do not like anything red to be around when it rains, like a red blanket. It is covered up or taken off the bed. [822]

During a thunderstorm the Chiricahua refrain from eating, even though the food is prepared and waiting. Eating during a storm causes much lightning, it is thought. Even if nothing else happens, a person who eats during lightning will lose his teeth. [264]

A paint [pied or spotted] horse is dangerous during a thunderstorm. If you are riding one at such a time, you get off. [231]

It is dangerous to have a little fawn around in the rainy season. If they find one, they get scared and let it go, for lightning is likely to strike you if you keep it. [825]

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The Mountain People are ordinarily pitted against disease, but they may themselves cause sickness if their rules are ignored. "The Mountain Spirits may cause you to become disfigured. [732] That is why the masked dancers do not touch each other. Many [535] are afraid of this sickness." Insanity may be regarded as punish- [784] ment for omission of necessary ritual gestures during the masked- [828] dancer preparation: "If the masked-dancer headdress is put on without ceremony, it makes you crazy; you see the Mountain Spirits all the time."

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Menstrual blood.—Menstrual blood is dangerous for males, and girls are taught to dispose carefully of pads worn during the flow. The illness suffered by a man or a boy as a result of contact with menstrual blood is always described as rheumatism or malformation of the joints. The most serious form of the malady is contracted from union with a menstruating woman. "The [834] Chiricahua are afraid to have intercourse with a woman during her period. It makes them misshapen and deformed. They become unable to straighten their arms or legs. I heard of one man [732] who did this. This man was pointed out to me. He was deformed in this way."